

“Marks of a True Leader,” Part 4 - 2 Corinthians 11:16-21 – February 26th, 2017

- Today's teaching will be part four of a series I've titled, "Marks of a True Leader."
- I need to begin with a confession of sorts concerning my attempts to hurry through this relatively long chapter in 2 Corinthians.
- Please know that I did so with the best of intentions, such that, I didn't want to teach a series longer than it needed to be taught.

- As I studied this particular chapter, the Lord impressed upon me the need to slow down and take my time teaching through it.
- This because, the message within it is the clarion call for the church today, which as one said, is given over to splash and flash.
- In other words, instead of weakness and meekness the pulpits today are all about the false gospel known as health and wealth.

A couple of weeks ago, I happened upon a most interesting blog by a Bill Muehlenberg who posted a commentary titled, "2 Corinthians and the Heart of Christian Life and Ministry." In it he writes, "I have a confession to make: I did not always love Second Corinthians like I do now. A lot of it is about Paul defending himself and his ministry, and he even speaks about boasting in this if he must. That seemed a bit odd to me, and I did not always fully understand and appreciate what he was getting at in this epistle. But for various reasons, in the past few decades 2 Corinthians has rocketed to my number one New Testament book. ...Many of our churches preach a triumphant gospel, one that often exalts power, one that exalts self, and one that exalts success. We find this especially in the health and wealth gospels, and in the name it and claim it theologies, both of which basically look down upon suffering and weakness. Thus 2 Corinthians is THE book of the hour for so much of Western Christianity. In it Paul takes on the "super apostles" and those who exalt all sorts of things... Paul boasts instead of his weakness, his afflictions, his hardships and his suffering. These are the real marks of the true minister of the gospel he insists.

<https://billmuehlenberg.com/2017/02/18/2-corinthians-heart-christian-life-ministry/>

- One of the things the Lord has been ministering to me is that suffering and affliction is part and parcel in the life of a Christian.
- However, when we're accepting of this, and even boasting in this, we're met with formidable opposition from most Christians.
- The reason being is that we are seen as weaker in our faith, at best, or under the punishing hand of God for some sin, at worst.
- Sadly, this ugly reality within the church has lent itself to many a Christian putting on a fake smile as they hang on by a thread.
- This as they suffer in shameful silence in a horrible marriage, or are deeply hurting at the hands of a prodigal son or daughter.
- They dare not ever to be found out, lest they be cast out, under the banner of being a weak and even an immature Christian.
- Enter today's text and with it the Apostle Paul, who true to form, will turn the table of this Christian thinking concerning affliction.

1. They are fearlessly countercultural (Verses 16-18)

- v16 Paul repeating himself tells them that no one should take him as a fool, but if they do, then tolerate him as they do others.
- v17 He goes on to say that in his "self-confident boasting," he's not talking as the Lord would, but instead he's talking as a fool.
- v18 He then tells them that since many there in Corinth are boasting in the same way the world does, that he too will also boast.
- In order to really understand what Paul is saying here, we need to first know that the Corinthians forced Paul to defend himself.
- This is why he says he's not talking as the Lord would have him to, but rather as a fool, since they compared him to real fools.
- Namely, those false "super-apostles" who were boasting about their credentials so as to receive the applause of pop culture.
- This also explains why Paul takes this posture of countering them with the stark contrast of his credentials as a true apostle.
- While the false apostles boasted in their popularity and speaking ability, Paul was boasting about his weakness and affliction.

One commentator of this wrote, "Affliction was the key to Paul's effectiveness in ministry, and affliction is the key to effective ministry today. How countercultural this is. It even runs counter to so much "Christian" thinking that regards affliction as evidence of personal sin or efficient faith, and sleekness and ease as palpable evidence of divine blessing."

2. They don't beat the sheep (Verses 19-21)

- v19 Paul reminds them of how willing they are to gladly put up with these fools because they fancy themselves being so wise.
- v20 They even put up with anyone who enslaves, exploits or takes advantage of them putting on airs, slapping them in the face.
- v21 He says it's to his shame that he admits he was too weak for that saying whatever anyone else dare boast about he will too.
- Here, the Apostle Paul in his sanctified sarcasm tells them if they're wise enough to put up with fools they can put up with him.
- He takes it further and rebukes them for putting up with the spiritual abuse from the false apostles who took advantage of them.
- It's interesting to note back in that day, it was not uncommon for religious authorities to actually have people struck in the face.

Acts 23:2-3 - 2 And the high priest Ananias commanded those who stood by him to strike him on the mouth. 3 Then Paul said to him, "God will strike you, you whitewashed wall! For you sit to judge me according to the law, and do you command me to be struck contrary to the law?"

- I would suggest these super apostles were lording it over these Corinthian Christians, and in so doing held them in bondage.
- This speaks to the dangers of that authoritarian leader who, like wolves in sheep's clothing, draws disciples unto themselves.
- I find it interesting that in another display of sanctified sarcasm, Paul tells them that he's too "weak" to beat the sheep this way.

I'll close with by quoting one commentator who I think sums it up best, "Sadly, many people are more comfortable with authoritarian "super apostles" than they are with the freedom that is open to them in Jesus."